

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 401 579

CS 509 369

AUTHOR Strange, Bennett
TITLE If There Is a Problem, We Didn't Cause It.
PUB DATE Mar 96
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern States Communication Association (Memphis, TN, March 27-31, 1996).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bias; *Change Strategies; Civil Rights; Cultural Pluralism; *Debate; Higher Education; Minority Groups; Student Attitudes; *Student Participation
IDENTIFIERS Academic Community; *Debate Tournaments; *Diversity (Student)

ABSTRACT

In the past, there was no cry for diversity in academic debate because the exercise was strong enough to attract participants on its own merits. The professional fields of law, ministry, politics, and broadcasting were resplendent with former debaters. If there is a current lack of diversity in the forensic community, the debate community did not create it and the solution is to be found elsewhere. One survey of 50 programs showed that only one squad was totally male and 35.5% of the reported squad members were female. Another indicated that out of 64 schools, 5.78% of the debaters were African-Americans, compared to a 8.66% black student population. Those who see a problem with the current multicultural makeup of the forensic community offer such solutions as: (1) more African-American coaches; (2) more dedicated debate scholarships for minorities; and (3) more community involvement to attract attention. A change in the perception of inequality must come from the students themselves. Diversity is not the problem but the symptom, and evidence does not support the charge that the community created that symptom. The goal should be not to reach out to specific student blocks, but to the entire student population. (Contains 17 references.) (CR)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
OERI position or policy

B. Strange

IF THERE IS A PROBLEM, WE DIDN'T CAUSE IT

Bennett Strange

Associate Professor of Communication Arts and Director of Forensics
Louisiana College, Pineville, LA

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

First let's get something clear. I am biased. I long for the days when academic debate was truly challenging. The period when constructive speeches were ten minutes in length, First Affirmatives were delivered from memory, there was no such thing as "prep time", and there were five preliminary rounds on one day with the out rounds beginning early the next morning. In those enviable times, there were three divisions in debate: Senior Men, Junior Men, and Women.

There was no CEDA, NDT, nor NEDA: The American Forensic Association coordinated the activity which was totally inclusive.

Go back forty years and you wouldn't find tournaments with collapsed divisions because of lack of participants. And, with the exception of the tournaments in specific "Deep South" states, it was not a lily white experience either. Schools like Prairie View College in Texas and Grambling State University in Louisiana, now called Historically Black Colleges or Universities (Rogers, 23), were represented by teams while non-segregated institutions such as The Ohio State University, Marquette University, and the University of Notre Dame had non-white members on their squads.

There was no cry for diversity because the exercise was strong enough to attract participants on its own merits. The late Dr. Waldo Braden told the Pi Kappa Delta National Convention and Tournament in 1959 that fields such as politics, ministry,

ED 401 579

CS 509 369

law, and broadcasting were resplendent with former debaters. He posited six attributes that contributed to academic debate's popularity.

1) Intercollegiate debating attracts students with superior intelligence. 2) It develops an intense interest in public affairs. 3) It creates a great desire to improve. 4) It throws the participant into competition with other bright students. 5) It teaches the student how to analyze, to think critically, and to listen. 6) It develop the ability to extemporize, to express thoughts clearly and fluently under pressure. (Simonson and Strange, 2)

Note there is nothing about the advantages of diversity and/or multiculturalism adding to the strength of the forensic activity. Those ideas were decades later being added.

Now we have charges that academic debate is a "white male activity." (Loge, 79) And that the lack of diversity hurts all debaters. (Loge, 81).

The research in this area is nothing new as Kristine Bartanen noted, "Educators have explored participation and success rates of men and women debaters for nearly three decades." (1)

Rogers (22) and others (Adams and Cox, 40) reported their findings in researching the literature regarding participation and success of minorities. The research led Rogers to claim that the matter must be addressed less it leads to a dissolution of the forensic activity (25).

With claims of such catastrophe facing the forensic community, it is a problem worthy of our attention.

Is diversity a desirable goal? Most of those writing

claim that it is without noting what diversity is. Arturo Madrid, a Hispanic professor of languages, defines it as, "Diversity is lack of standardization, or orderliness, homogeneity. Diversity introduces complications, is difficult to organize, is troublesome to manage, is problematical. ...In short, diversity is desirable only in principle, not in practice." (7)

But those more astute than I content that diversity is desirable so let's consider that a point of agreement. Is there a lack of diversity in the forensic community?

As advertised, I submit that if there is a problem, the debate community did not create it and the solution is be found elsewhere.

Crenshaw makes the reasonable argument that "causal reasoning supplies good reasons for 'commitments to policy choices or to systems of belief which transcend whim, caprice, or the non-reflexive "claim of immediacy"'. " (70) Thus, if we are to seek a solution, we must first answer the question, "Who is to blame?" (Crenshaw, 82).

Let's start with the claim that females are under represented in forensic activity. I will agreed with Tuman's observation that sexual harassment probably exists (85) but I would deny that it is in the sole provence of female abuse, but that's for another forum. From causal reasoning, if sexual harassment keeps females from participating, shouldn't it have the same result on males who are sexually harassed? Moot point.

Seeking some empirical support, Watt surveyed the CEDA Top 50 programs in the Spring of 1989. His Top 50 was based on the Executive Secretary's Report (1). One area about which he sought information was the gender makeup of the squads. Of the schools responding, "the majority of squads consist primarily of male debaters although there are several notable exceptions among the Top 50 ranked schools. Actually, there were three squads which were predominately composed of female debaters." (6)

An analysis of the data reveals that only one squad was totally male and 35.5% of the reported squad members were female. What is the threshold for under representation? If Watt's figure is not enough, Meyer noted that "PKD's 1987 National Tournament was already composed of more female than male participants, fifty-three percent to forty-seven percent respectively." (235) Granted that this figure indicated both debaters and individual event entries.

Murphy contends that if females are to find success and happiness in the forensic experience, then they must conform to the communication style of the males (as quoted in Meyer, 235). Judging from the Pi Kappa Delta data this has not been an inherent barrier to participation.

Loge concludes that "clearly, African-Americans are under-represented in CEDA" (80) even though his own research indicates that out of 64 schools surveyed, 5.78% of the debaters were African-Americans compared to 8.66% of the student population being black. He places the blame on a perception of being under

represented.

However, Meyer in his survey of the 1987 Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament found that African-American, Asian, Hispanic and Native American participants composed ten per cent of the contestants. (236)

Realizing that our private, liberal arts college is not representative of the larger academic community, an analysis of our squad makeup over the past decade, counting only those who went to at least one tournament, shows 48 per cent female, 12 per cent African American, 8 per cent Asians and 4 per cent Cajun (a truly under represented subculture). The debate squad represents about 1 per cent of the student body.

Those who see a problem with the current multicultural makeup of the forensic community offer solutions such as more African American coaches (Loge, 85), more dedicated debate scholarships for minorities (Loge, 85; Rogers, 26), and more community involvement to attract attention (Preston, 47; Rogers, 25-26) as a way to correct the implied imbalance.

Others look to other things such as the wording of the resolutions to be debated should be changed so as to reflect minority interests. (K. Bartanen, 8)

A study of the numbers regarding female and minority participation does not reveal a problem of such magnitude to justify these solutions; plan won't meet the need.

What then is the problem? Rogers notes that "Real or not, if minority and nontraditional students perceive (emphasis added)

themselves as unwanted, unwelcomed and/or unsuccessful, how can the forensic community realistically expect them to embrace what is often perceived (emphasis added) of by them as an 'affluent, white, male activity' and to validate it and themselves through increased participation?" (24)

Loge claims a perception among the black community of "selling out" to the white community (83).

In 1989 a committee was appointed by then CEDA President Ann Gill to survey the CEDA community on several issues, one of which was the openness of opportunity. The report of the committee was that "there is considerable agreement--some even wrote that the organizaes is too open and tried to be all things to all people--at the expence of identity." (Withcombe, 28)

The problem, simply put, is one of perception since the numbers do not support a claim of inherent barriers. I submit that the forensic community in removing the gender designation of the events and expanding the umbrella has done its share in trying to reshape the perception.

The variety of solutions referred to earlier do not attack the perception issue either. In fact, I would submit that such things as designated minority scholarships, set asides for minority travel, special recruiting programs with minority or gender designations, et al preserve the perception.

The responsibility of the forensic community is succinctly stated by Freeley who writes "...educators should strive to treat all students fairly and to promote equality or opportunity for

appropriate and challenging learning experiences." (33)

Basing his opinion upon his eight years' experience as a Director of Forensics at a HBCU, Rogers noted that his students did not want "special treatment" but "asked only to be treated the same as the white males." (24)

While speaking of racial understanding, Weber's comments could well be applied to the issue of gender equality. She noted, "The beginning of racial understanding is the acceptance that different is just what it is: different, not inferior. And equality does not mean sameness." (36)

But, you might say, we as educators have done this but the perception of inequality exists. How is it to be met? The National Conference on Race & Ethnicity in American Higher Education suggests that the answer lies with the participants.

The influence that peers have on one another is often far greater than that exerted by faculty and/or staff, providing a unique opportunity for student to support one another academically and to inspire a vision of success in the minds of fellow students. (25)

The changes must come from the participants themselves if they are to occur since they are the ones who control the culture of the forensic process (Rowland, 107).

If the numbers contribute to the perception that minorities and females are under represented, I am afraid that they are being misinterpreted. Our problem is to attract students for as Michael Bartanen reported for the Guild of American Forensic Educators in 1993, the number of schools participating in

forensics and the number of students involved is decreasing. (1)

Diversity is not the problem but the symptom. And the evidence does not support the charge that the community created that symptom. We need to be more concerned with treating the illness than the misconceived perception.

Our goal, therefore, should not be to reach out to specific student blocks but to the entire student population. We need to be more concerned about the virutes of the activity as Braden noted decades ago or the perception that forensics is dying will become a reality.

Works Cited

- Adams, Clifton W., and E. Sam Cox (1995). "Pi Kappa Delta's Leadership Role in Competitive Debate: Toward Fairness, Civility and Accessibility", The Forensic of Pi Kappa Delta (80,4) pp 38-56
- Bartanen, Kristine (1995) "Developing Student Voices in Academic Debate through a Feminist Perspective of Learning, Knowing and Arguing", Contemporary Argumentation and Debate (16) pp 1-13
- Bartanen, Michael (1993). "The Educational Objectives of the Guild of American Forensic Educators," The Forensic of Pi Kappa Delta (78,2) pp 1-11
- Crenshaw, Carrie (1993). "Dominant Form and Marginalized Voices: Argumentation and Feminism(s)", CEDA Yearbook (14) pp 72-79
- Freeley, Austin J. (1996). Argumentation and Debate (9th) Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company
- Loge, Peter (1991). "Black Participation in CEDA Debate: A Quantification and Analysis", CEDA Yearbook (12) pp 79-87
- Madrid, Arturo (1995). "Diversity and Its Discontents", Voices: A Selection of Multicultural Readings. Ed Kathleen S.

Verderber. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company

- Meyer, James P. (1991). "Diversity: Responsibility for the Judge as Educator Critic", Proceedings to the 1991 (Pi Kappa Delta) Professional Development Conference. pp 234-239
- Preston, C. Thomas, Jr (1992). "Recruitment and Retention for Competitive Forensics at an Urban Commuter University", The Forensic of Pi Kappa Delta (77,4) pp 1-10
- Rogers, Jack E. (1995). "Interrogating the Myth of Multiculturalism: Toward Significant Membership and Participation of African Americans in Forensics", The Forensic of Pi Kappa Delta (80,4) pp 21-30
- Rowland, Robert (1995). "The Practical Pedagogical Function of Academic Debate", Contemporary Argumentation and Debate (16) pp 98-108
- Simonson, Walter E. and Bennett Strange (1960). Fundamentals of Debate Hattiesburg, MS: Geiger Publishing Co.
- Southwest Center for Human Relations Study (1996). "Acquiring the Tools for Dynamic Student Leadership on College Campuses", National Conference on Race & Ethnicity in American Higher Education (University of Oklahoma)
- Tuman, Joseph S. (1993). "A Response to Crenshaw's 'Dominant Form and Marginalized Voices: Argumentation about Feminism(s)'", CEDA Yearbook (14) pp 8491
- Watt, Willis M. (1991). "Exploring Some Possible Success Variables in CEDA Debate Programs", The Forensic of Pi Kappa Delta (76,2) pp 1-11
- Weber, Shirley N. (1995). "The Need to Be: The Socio-Cultural Significance of Black Language", Voices: A Selection of Multicultural Readings. Ed Kathleen S. Verderber. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co.
- Withycombe, Robert M. (1991). "The State of CEDA", CEDA 1991: 20th Anniversary Assessment Conference Proceedings. Ed David Thomas. Dubuque, IW: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co.

Paper delivered at the Southern States Communication Association annual convention, Memphis, TN, March 1996.

CS 509369

Would you like to put your paper in ERIC? Please send us a clean, dark copy!



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Paper presented at the 1996 SSCA Convention (Memphis)	
If there is a problem, we didn't cause it.	
Author(s): Bennett Strange	
Corporate Source:	Publication Date: March 27-31, 1996

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic/optical media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) or other ERIC vendors. Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following two options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents



Check here
For Level 1 Release:
Permitting reproduction in microfiche (4" x 6" film) or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic or optical) and paper copy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Level 1

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2 documents



Check here
For Level 2 Release:
Permitting reproduction in microfiche (4" x 6" film) or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic or optical), but *not* in paper copy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Level 2

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits. If permission to reproduce is granted, but neither box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

"I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic/optical media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries."

Sign
here→
please
Lou

Signature:

Bennett Strange

Organization/Address:

Louisiana College
Bineville, LA 71359

Printed Name/Position/Title:

Bennett Strange, Associate
Professor of Communication Arts

Telephone:

318-487-7321

FAX:

318-487-7191

E-Mail Address:

bstrange@andria.
lacollege.edu

Date:

11-20-96

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

Acquisition
ERIC/REC
2805 E. Tenth Street
Smith Research Center, 150
Indiana University
Bloomington, IN 47408

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

~~ERIC Processing and Reference Facility~~
~~1301 Piccard Drive, Suite 100~~
~~Rockville, Maryland 20850-4306~~

Telephone: 301-256-5500
FAX: 301-848-3696
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov

(Rev 3/96/96)